

Brownley Building
1300-1304 F Street NW
Washington, D.C.

HABS No. DC-381

HABS,
DC,
WASH,
244-

PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

BROWNLEY BUILDING

HABS,
DC,
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244-

Location: 1300-1304 F Street, NW, Lot 23, Square 254, southwest corner of F and 13th Streets, NW, Washington, D.C.

Present Owner: The Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation, 425 13th Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20006

Present Occupant: The Blue Mirror Grill, The Electronics Corner

Present Use: Retail sales and restaurant; to be demolished

Significance: The building permit for the Brownley Building notes that when built in 1932, it received an award from the Architect's Advisory Council for "meeting exceptionally well the standards which should be maintained for private buildings in the National Capital." The design successfully relates to the traditional fabric of older buildings in the area. Through its ornamentation, the Brownley Building captures the visual variety typical of older, more traditional buildings and relates to the pedestrian scale of F Street.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1932 (permit #153871, 5/26/32)
2. Architects: Porter and Lockie, D.C.
3. Original and subsequent owners: Originally owned by Caleb C. Willard, the trustees of his estate, Boyd, Willard, and Howe, sold the property title in 1919 (Liber #4215, Folio 15) to Walter Brownley. Following Brownley's death, the deed was transferred to the Brownley Investment Company in 1923 (Liber #5063, Folio 10). Ed R. Brownley, surviving trustee, maintained ownership of the property until the sale to PADC in 1979.
4. Builder: Davis, Wick, and Rosengarter
5. Original plans and construction: No original plans are available for the Brownley Building. According to various accounts, the space currently occupied by the Blue Mirror Grill was subdivided into five retail shops.
6. Alterations and additions: Exterior alterations consist of a new storefront (no permit available) on the western four bays of the north facade. Interior layouts have been periodically altered to accommodate various tenants.

B. Development of site:

The current Lot 23 is made up of original Lots 23 and 231 (24). Both lots were originally owned by Caleb C. Willard, the youngest son of the Willard family. C.C. Willard owned at one time the majority of Square 254, and was a primary land owner in Washington, D.C. After C.C. Willard's death, the trustees of the estate sold Lots 23 and 24 to Walter Brownley in 1919. Following Brownley's death, ownership of the new Lot 23 was continued by the Metropolitan Bank of Washington and James H. Johnson and Ed Brownley, executors of W. Brownley. The existing building was built in 1932, and the assessment in 1933 was \$95,000. The tenants included men's and women's fashions, a milliners, and the Brownley confectionary. The Blue Mirror Grill located here in 1956.

C. Bibliography:

1. Primary sources:

District of Columbia Building Permits, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

District of Columbia Deed Records. Recorder of Deeds, Washington, D.C.

2. Secondary sources:

All of the following are available at the Washingtoniana Division of the Martin Luther King branch of the D.C. Public Library.

Baist Real Estate Atlas Collection

D.C. City Directories, 1865-1979

D.C. General Assessment Records

Prepared by: Anderson, Notter/Mariani
Historic Preservation Consultants for PADC

Wendy Hunter
Architect for PADC
December 1979

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The interior was designed for flexibility in leasing with freestanding columns and partitioning according to occupancy demands. Its exterior

Art Deco detailing blends well with the traditional fabric of the older buildings in the area.

2. Condition of fabric: The building has been well maintained and is in good condition.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The building is two stories high with a basement. It completely fills its rectangular lot, measuring 60' on F Street and 100' on 13th Street. The F Street elevation is seven bays wide. On 13th Street, there are twelve bays with a marked slope toward Pennsylvania Avenue (to the south).
2. Foundations: Concrete and steel.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: The 13th and F Street facades are clad in cut stone. At the east end of the north elevation is a three-bay storefront which appears to be original, although it is now partially covered by signs and the support structure of roll-up doors. A new storefront design has replaced the original in the remaining four bays on the north. The building's second floor is defined by a relief volute belt course. Windows are separated by fluted piers. Stone panels above each window have a circular design. The building is topped by a metal decorative band and stone parapet. The 13th Street (east) elevation is twelve bays across, with a facade treatment similar to the one on F Street. Although the grade slopes markedly toward Pennsylvania Avenue (to the south), the two-story organization is retained. The southernmost bay includes a slightly projecting pedimented pavilion.

The second level repeats the low-relief frieze with acanthus motif which is found on the north elevation. The pavilion to the south is flanked by massive pilasters that ascend to the roof line. There is an unadorned triangular pediment above this with a central relief panel featuring an urn with a foliage surround.

4. Structural system and framing: This is a masonry building with party walls on its southern and western boundaries. The floor system consists of steel beams.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: All exterior doors are of steel and glass.
 - b. Windows: Two types of windows prevail on the 13th and F Street elevations: at the first level, 13th Street, there are two small square lights with metal grilles

above each of the display windows. At the second level, in both elevations, there are dual metal casement windows with fixed glass transoms above another fixed light below. A decorative aluminum balcony rail shields the lower light.

6. Roof: The flat roof is articulated on the north and east elevations by a metal decorative band and a recessed parapet.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Basement: The basement is an open space with interruptions only for the structural piers. Currently housing a discotheque, a stage is located against the north wall (near the center of the basement space), and a fountain has been incorporated in the center. A raised bar area is located against the south wall. The remainder of the basement is used for storage and mechanical equipment.

2. First floor: At present, the first floor is divided into two major spaces: a retail radio/camera shop in the northeast corner, and the Blue Mirror Grill, in the remainder. The Electronics Corner is an open plan, two bays wide, with storage area behind the south wall.

The Blue Mirror occupies space originally allocated for five commercial stores. Three long dining rooms and a small service kitchen are located on the first floor.

3. Mezzanine level: The restaurant office is located here, along with liquor rooms and dressing room. Any mechanical equipment can be reached in the catwalk area located on this level.
4. Second floor: The second floor occupied by the Blue Mirror Grill includes a preparation kitchen with access to storage areas, another kitchen (with a dumbwaiter), and a rear staircase in the southeast corner of the building exiting at the first floor kitchen of the Blue Mirror. This staircase also provides access to the roof. The second floor over the Electronics Corner is used as storage and mechanical equipment for the Blue Mirror.
5. Stairways: One half-turn staircase is located in the center dining wing. Steps are cement and railings are iron. The stairs in the southeast corner are also of cement, but are full-turn.
6. Flooring: Retail floors are of linoleum tile. Upper floors are of wood.
7. Wall and ceiling finish: The interiors of both the Electronics Corner and the Blue Mirror Grill are additions by the tenants. The Blue Mirror is noted for its cobalt blue mirrors which

cover the walls creating the impression of a larger space than exists. A floral "fresco" is also on the arched ceiling of the first dining room.

8. Openings: Typical doors are wood paneled.

D. Site:

This building occupies the northeast corner of this block. Due to its proximity to Pennsylvania Avenue and the White House, F Street (between 9th and 15th Streets) has been the center of Washington's commercial activity throughout its history. Today, the street is composed of buildings in a variety of architectural styles dating from the 19th and early 20th centuries. F Street contains predominantly four to five story buildings with one or two ten to fourteen story buildings occurring on each block. In the 1300 block, three tall structures exist: the National Press Building, Bond's, and the American Building. The strong architectural cohesion of this block reflects the fact that most buildings were constructed within a ten-year period (1922-32), and that the three buildings located at 1310-1322 F Street were designed by the same architectural firm, Marsh and Peter. All buildings on the block exhibit great care in architectural detailing and ornamentation, particularly at the street level. Such care and deliberation of design in this block of F Street has enhanced the pedestrian path and reduced the image of grand scale to that of human proportion.

Prepared by: Anderson, Notter/Mariani
Historic Preservation Consultants for PADC

Wendy Hunter
Architect for PADC
December 1979

PART III PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation (PADC) in compliance with Executive Order 11593 and a Memorandum of Agreement with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation as a mitigative effort in the completion of the Pennsylvania Avenue development plan. John A. Burns, AIA, and Emily J. Harris were the HABS project coordinators. The records were prepared under the general supervision of Jeffrey S. Wolf, Architect with PADC. Historic data was compiled by PADC consultants in historic preservation Anderson, Notter/Mariani and expanded by Wendy Hunter, Architect with PADC. Documentary photographs were taken by Jeffrey S. Wolf in December 1979. The data was edited and prepared for transmittal to the Library of Congress by Robert S. Lange, an architectural historian in the HABS office, in June 1980.